

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

HONORING THE WORK OF THE VALLEY SYRIA RELIEF COM- MITTEE

HON. JAMES P. McGOVERN

OF MASSACHUSETTS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, November 18, 2021

Mr. McGOVERN. Madam Speaker, I rise in appreciation of the efforts of my constituents to educate their fellow Americans about the human consequences of more than a decade of horrendous armed conflict in Syria and to provide support to the Syrian people.

The crisis in Syria has faded from the headlines here in the U.S. But my constituents understand that democracy and justice, at home and abroad, depend on the commitment and participation of engaged American citizens. They have not given up, and neither must we.

Their efforts are well described in a column by Sara Weinberger of the Valley Syria Relief Committee, published on November 15 in the *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, and which I would like to include in the RECORD.

HUMAN RIGHTS IN SYRIA HITS HOME

(By Sara Weinberger)

"It was 11:15 a.m. on Sept. 30th. I was one of six heads on the Zoom screen. Michael Kane, Micky McKinley, Debbie Shriver and I stared in silence. The four of us comprised The Valley Syrian Relief Committee.

"Sharing the screen were two of Congressman Jim McGovern's staff. We had requested the meeting to give the congressman an update on the war in Syria, now in its 11th year, and to ask that he raise his voice in Congress to save Syrian lives.

"What we didn't know was that McGovern had spent the morning trying to pass a stop-gap bill on the last day of the fiscal year to prevent a government shutdown. Not a great day for our meeting, I thought, imagining a preoccupied McGovern politely listening to our presentation, while his mind was elsewhere. Apologizing for his late arrival, he left his morning crisis at the door, and for the next hour listened intently, asked questions, and showed us that the purpose of our visit genuinely mattered.

"In 2011, Syrians, inspired by our democratic form of government, demonstrated in defiance of the authoritarian regime of Syria's brutal dictator, Bashar Al Assad. They have been paying for it ever since with their lives and their livelihoods, with a whole generation of traumatized children who have lost loved ones, ran for refuge from barrel bombs, and tried to hold onto hope in a place that many have deemed a hell on earth. Yet, with our own country's democracy in peril, garnering interest in longstanding wars on the other side of the world can be a challenge.

"This was not the case in our own community, where several hundred of McGovern's constituents have faithfully demonstrated their commitment and concern for the welfare of Syrians since 2014. In September 2015, they filled the sanctuary of First Churches for our first big event, "Songs for Syria" to raise funds for the Syrian American Medical Society. We reminded McGovern of the hundreds who accepted our invitations to edu-

cate members of his district's interfaith organizations, who broke bread with us, shared soup, and bought copies of "The Soup for Syria" cookbook, produced by local publisher Michel Moushabeck.

"Folks from Franklin and Hampshire counties shipped a container filled with everything from diapers, to winter clothing, to shoes and boots to enable refugees and displaced people living in tents to survive the long Syrian winter. Actions led to more actions: groups gathered to write personal letters of hope to assure Syrian children and their families that they are not alone.

"Rebecca Leopold's students at Amherst Regional High School formed the Refugees in Distress Club, developing a curriculum to educate younger students about the situation in Syria. With the help of our partners at the Washington, D.C.-based Syrian Emergency Task Force, Mazen Al-Hamuda, spent a day at ARHS openly shared his traumatic story of the physical and emotional scars of brutal torture he endured in a Syrian prison.

"The above stories only scratch the surface of the many actions the residents of Congressional District 2 engaged in on behalf of the Syrian people. Their efforts allowed the Valley Syrian Relief Committee to raise more than \$200,000 for humanitarian assistance and bring internationally known experts to inform and engage people in efforts to make sure the people of Syria are not forgotten.

"Pivoting to Zoom in 2020, our supporters generously donated funds to purchase two school buses to serve as an evacuation vehicle when the bombs start falling, an ambulance to get medical help for injured children, and of course, to transport the young children to their beloved Wisdom House School.

"There was heartbreak too. The news of Mazen Al Hamouda's disappearance in Syria broke all of our hearts, especially those of the students who fell in love with the lanky man with dark shadows under his eyes. Mazen's legacy will live on with some of these students, who went on to college to major in human rights and international relations. They will be the future peacebuilders, replacing dictatorships with civil societies in Syria and beyond.

"McGovern has been an ally for the Syrian people. He has organized programs for his congressional colleagues and others through the Lantos Human Rights Commission, to showcase Syrian heroes such as Caesar, who smuggled thousands of photographs of brutalized bodies of imprisoned Syrians, to expose to the world the war crimes of the Assad regime. We were moved by the genuine feelings expressed at the end of our meeting, when McGovern reminding his colleagues in Congress that they must recommit to bringing about an end to the carnage.

"Our own country is on a precipice, with democracy hanging by a thread. Recently, I have become aware that what has happened in Syria could one day envelop our own country. Fascism is rearing its ugly head on every continent. Aligning ourselves to support those who are suffering can grow an international movement for human rights. It begins in communities like those in western Massachusetts, with those who actively uphold the humanity of our brothers and sisters, no matter where they live."

RECOGNIZING MIKE EPPS, COME- DIAN, PRODUCER, AND ACTOR

HON. ANDRÉ CARSON

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, November 18, 2021

Mr. CARSON. Madam Speaker, today I rise to recognize Mike Epps, who will be filming his next Netflix comedy special in his hometown of Indianapolis and will also be inducted into the Madam Walker Legacy Center Walk of Fame on November 20, 2021.

Mike was born in Indianapolis to parents Mary Reed and Tommie Epps, and raised in our great city. Mike began performing comedy as a teenager. After achieving success in standup comedy, he moved to Atlanta, Georgia, to pursue a career in comedy at the Comedy Act Theater.

At 21 years old, Mike moved to New York City where he became a sensation in the underground Black comedy scene. Mike's career continued to prosper, performing in two HBO Def Comedy Jam broadcasts and appearing in the movie "Strays" in 1997 and the television series "The Sopranos" in 1999.

After New York, Mike's rise to fame took him to Los Angeles, where he landed a role in Ice Cube's movie "Next Friday." His acting career gained momentum, appearing in films such as "Dr. Dolittle 2," "All About the Benjamins" and "The Fighting Temptations," to name just a few.

Mike has used his platform to support our city and give back to others. In 2012, he served as the "Super Bowl Ambassador" to Indianapolis. In addition, his generous contributions to the Tupac Amaru Shakur Foundation for the Arts in Georgia has helped provide opportunities for young people wishing to follow in his footsteps.

Today, I ask my colleagues to join me in honoring Mike Epps. Our community is proud of his success and deeply grateful for his dedicated philanthropic and mentorship efforts, which are making a positive impact in the lives of countless young people across the country.

HONORING DR. DIETER MARTIN GRUEN'S 99TH BIRTHDAY

HON. SEAN CASTEN

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, November 18, 2021

Mr. CASTEN. Madam Speaker, I rise today to celebrate Dr. Dieter Martin Gruen's 99th birthday, honor his service and contributions to the scientific community, and record my continued support for his nomination for the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

For nearly eight decades, Dr. Gruen has worked to enhance American technology development as a former Manhattan Project Scientist and Argonne National Laboratory Distinguished Fellow. Born in 1922, Dr. Gruen is an

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